

WEBINAR | AUGUST 2025

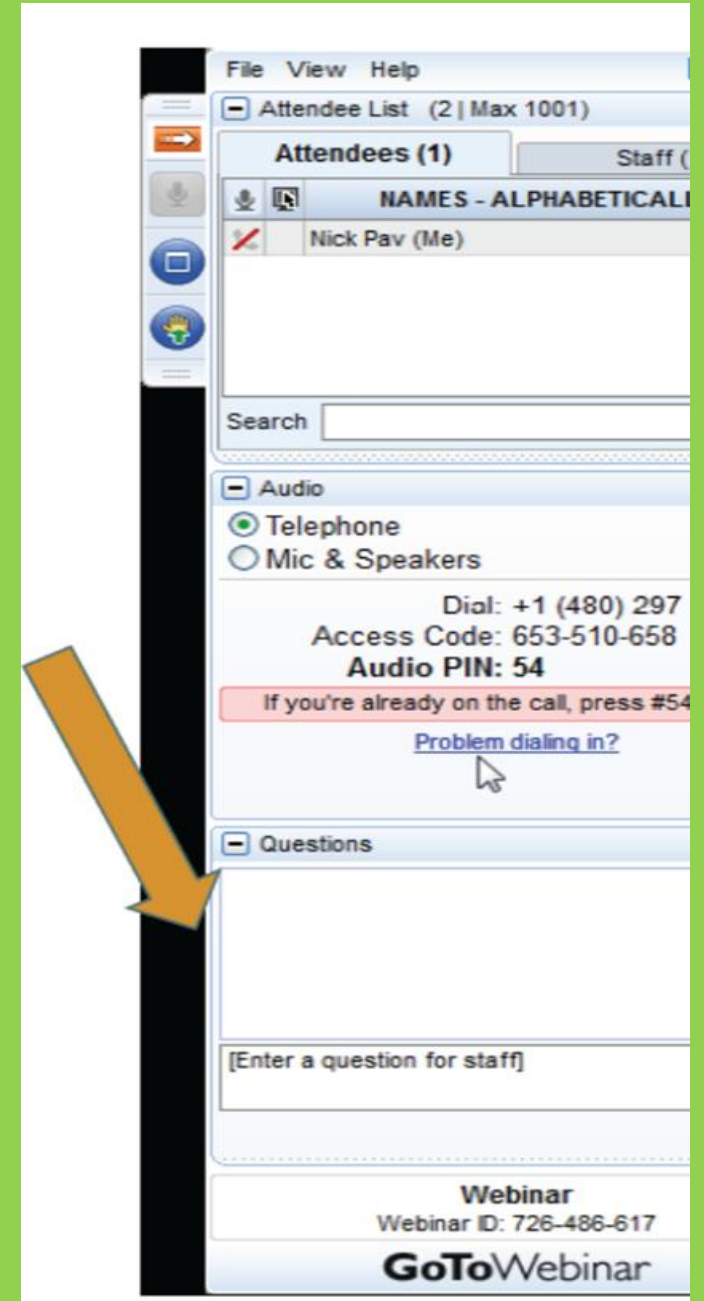
CalFresh Access for Students in Foster Care: Understanding Eligibility and Benefits

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Logistics

- Webinar resources, including recording and supplemental materials, will be posted at <https://allianceforchildrensrights.org/resources/>
- All attendees are muted during webinar.
- Please submit questions using the “Questions” function on your GoToWebinar dashboard.





CalFresh Access for Students in Foster Care

Understanding Eligibility and Benefits

Presented by Amy Thiele, CalFresh
Policy Analyst,
California Department of Social Services

Introductions

Amy Thiele, Associate Governmental Program Analyst

- 3 years – California Department of Social Services - CalFresh Policy Bureau - Access Unit
- 3.5 years County Staff Services Analyst – Public Assistance Programs, Welfare-to-Work, Community Action Agency, Child Protective Services
- 10 years County Eligibility Worker – CalFresh, CalWORKs and Medi-Cal

CalFresh 101

What CalFresh Is

CalFresh is California's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

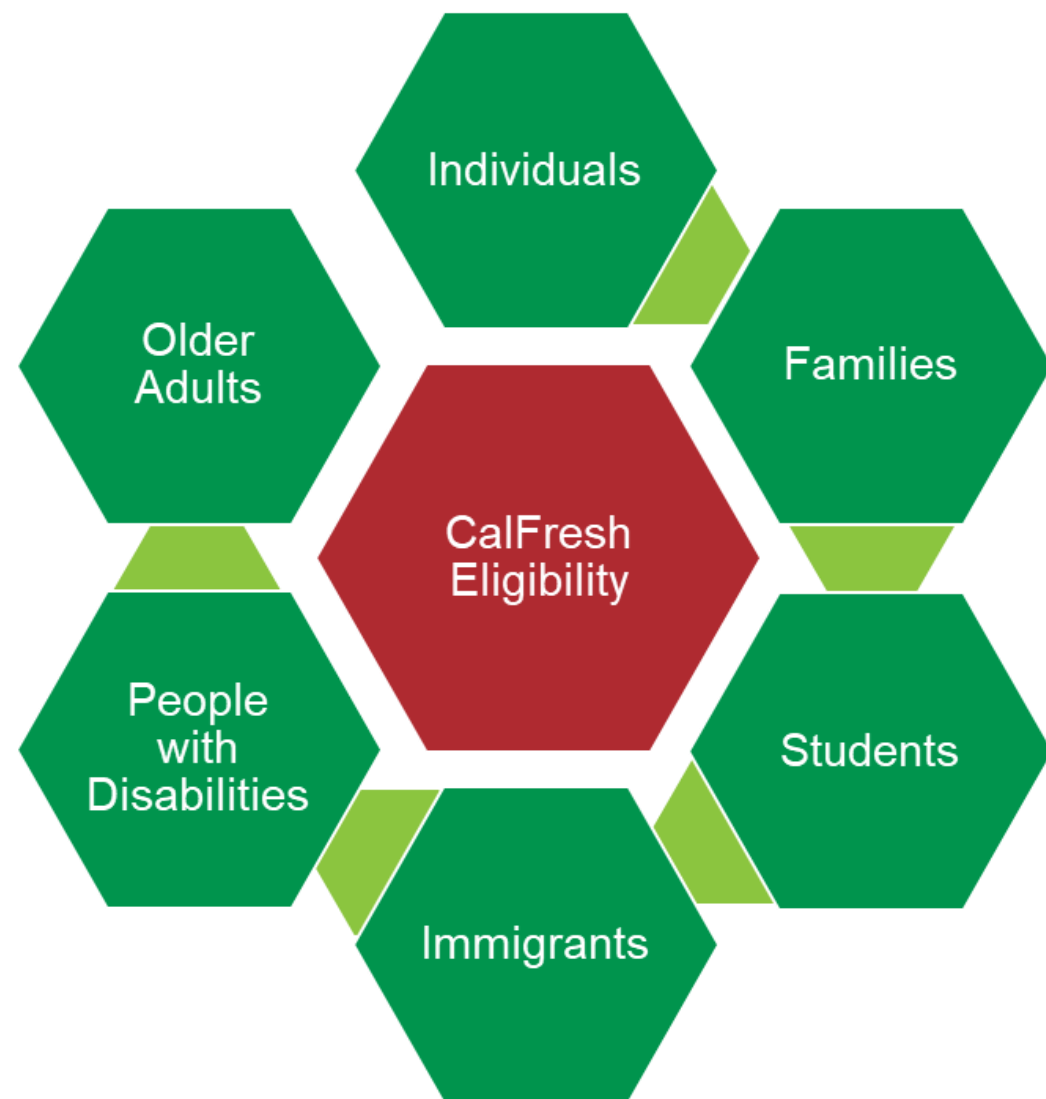
It provides monthly food benefits that can be used to buy food at many markets and grocery stores.

CalFresh improves the health and well-being of qualified households by providing money to meet their nutritional needs.

Who CalFresh Is For

CalFresh is for households with low-income who meet eligibility rules.

A CalFresh household is a group of people who “purchase and prepare” food together. They are not always related.



The CalFresh Household

- Some related persons MUST be in a household together.
 - Spouses who live together cannot be in separate households, regardless of the status of their relationship.
 - Parents and children under 22 who live together cannot be in separate households, regardless of the actual circumstances for buying, preparing, and eating food.
- There are special rules for foster families we will explore later.

CalFresh Eligibility Rules

In general, households that meet the following requirements are eligible:

- All required household members have been included in the application
- At least one member of the household has a qualifying citizenship or immigration status
- Household is low-income based on Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

Income Eligibility for CalFresh

Most money available to the household is considered income.

Income may be earned or unearned.

Households must have gross income under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

Net income after certain deductions must be under 100% FPL.

Effective October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025

Monthly Income Limits		
People in Household	Gross Monthly Income	Net Monthly Income
1	\$2,510	\$1,255
2	\$3,408	\$1,704
3	\$4,304	\$2,152
4	\$5,200	\$2,600
5	\$6,098	\$3,049
6	\$6,994	\$3,497
7	\$7,890	\$3,945
8	\$8,788	\$4,394
Each Additional Member	+\$898	+\$449

Net Income

Net income is gross income minus CalFresh deductions including, but not limited to:

- Standard deduction
- 20% earned income deduction
- A portion of shelter (rent/mortgage and utilities) expenses
- Childcare expenses
- Medical expenses for elderly or disabled households

Applying For and Keeping Benefits

Applying for CalFresh

The CalFresh process begins with an application. An applicant can apply in-person, online, or by mail.

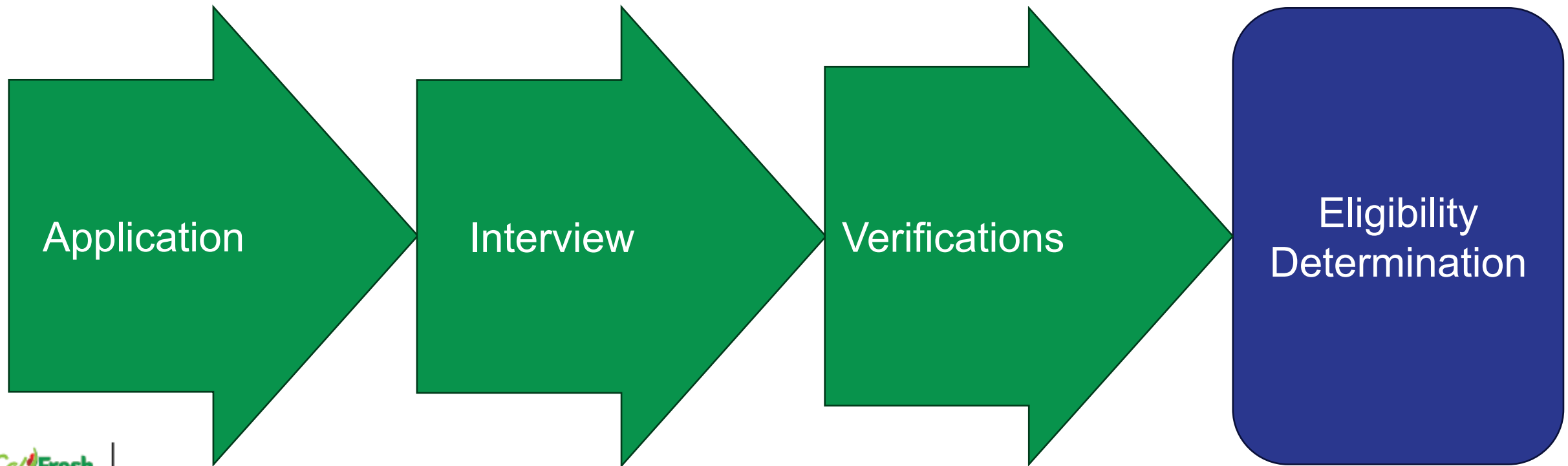
In person or by fax at the local office. Many offices also accept applications by phone.

Online at
www.BenefitsCal.com

By mail by sending form [SAWS 1](#) or form [CF 285](#) to your local office

Applying for CalFresh

The application process usually requires an interview.
Required documents must be submitted.



Required Information

- Name, date of birth, social security number, and citizenship/immigration status, and disability status for everyone in your household
- Income received by everyone in the household
- Household expenses such as rent/mortgage, utilities, childcare, etc.
- Special circumstances, such as college students

CalFresh Benefit Periods

CalFresh is approved for the length of a "Certification Period".

12 months: most households

24 months: households with older adults/
people with disabilities

36 months: households with only older adults/
people with disabilities and no
earned income

Ongoing Eligibility

- Complete an *Eligibility Status Report (SAR 7)* every 6 or 12 months depending on household type. This is where changes since the last certification are reported.
- Complete a recertification every 12, 24, or 36 months depending on household type. This will look similar to the application process with an interview and document submission.

Reporting Changes

Report these changes to your county office within 10 days as they happen:

- Mandatory changes regardless of impact on benefits.
 - Gross monthly income over Income Reporting Threshold
 - A drop in Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) work hours (currently waived)
 - “Significant” Lottery/Gambling Winnings

CalFresh for Foster Children and Youth

CalFresh and Foster Children

When determining CalFresh eligibility for a household that includes a foster child, the household has the option to exclude the foster child and the value of the foster care payment from the income calculation, if it is in their best interest to do so. This applies to all foster children/youth including Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs) with only two exceptions.

CalFresh and Foster Children

Exceptions to foster child optional exclusion:

- NMDs who are a CalFresh household of one. They cannot be excluded because no household would remain.
- Infants/children of included foster youth. A parent must be included in the same CalFresh household as their natural, adoptive, or step-child. Both must be included or both must be excluded.

CalFresh and Non-Minor Dependents

- California's high housing costs, as well as the high cost of other necessities can lead to food insecurity even when the NMD is receiving foster care funds.
- CalFresh allows for NMDs to use their income for other necessary expenses or savings.

Income of Non-Minor Dependents

The following CalFresh income rules apply to transition age foster youth in:

- Transitional Housing Program + Foster Care with:
 - Host family placement
 - Staffed site placement
 - Remote site placement
- Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP)

Treatment of Unearned Income

- Any portion of the NMD's foster care payment that is received directly by the NMD is considered unearned income and included when determining the household's eligibility and benefit level.
- Any portion that is not paid directly to the NMD must be excluded as unearned income. This includes the portion of the foster care payment that is paid directly to a transitional housing placement provider or any other vendor.

Treatment of Earned Income

- Income and incentive payments earned by a youth 16 years of age or older who is participating in in an Independent Living Program (ILP) is not considered income for the purposes of determining CalFresh eligibility.
- Income earned from employment, which constitutes part of a goal in the youth's ILP plan is excluded.

Treatment of NMD Gift Cards

Establishment-specific gift cards are excluded in determining a household's eligibility or benefit level.

If the extended foster care provider gives the NMD a gift card instead of money as a stipend, the gift card is only counted as income if it is a credit card company prepaid gift card.

NMDs with Children

- Infants/children of NMDs and Transition Age Youth (TAYs) living independently must be included in their parent's CalFresh household.
- Any amount of the infant supplement payment that is received directly by the NMD is considered unearned income and included when determining the household's eligibility and benefit level.

College Student Eligibility

The Student Eligibility Rule

There is a federal rule aimed at prohibiting college students from participating in CalFresh. This is commonly known as the Student Eligibility Rule.

Students between the ages of 18 & 49 who attend an institution of higher education half-time or more, are ineligible to receive CalFresh benefits unless they meet an exemption.

The CalFresh Student

A student is any person aged 18 through 49; physically and mentally fit for employment; and enrolled at least half-time in an institution of higher education. There is no differentiation between graduate students and other students.

More definitions

Institution of Higher Education - a vocational school that requires a high school diploma or a regular curriculum at a college or university.

Half-Time Enrollment - any term in which the student is enrolled in at least half of the number of credits needed each term to graduate timely.

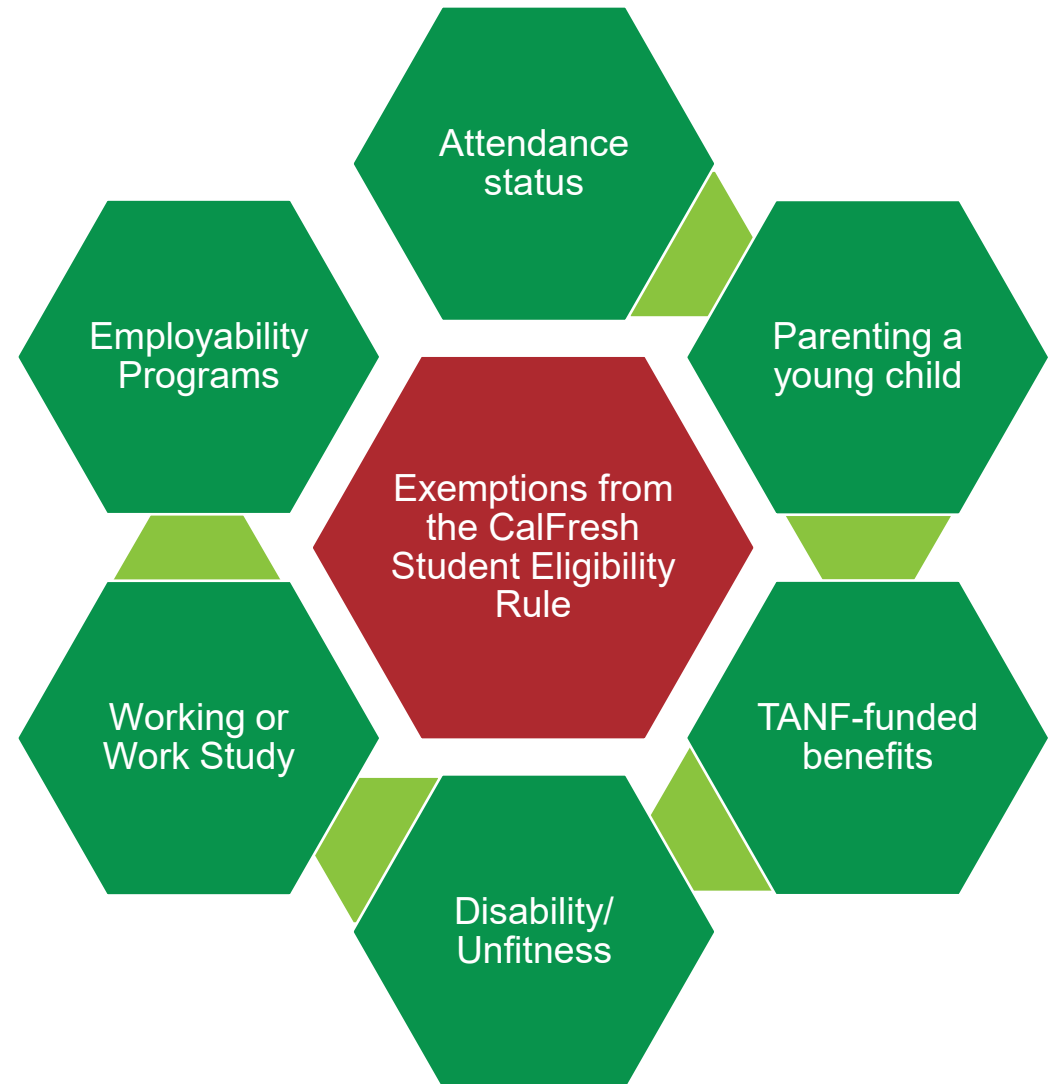
Adult Education Programs - the student eligibility rule does not apply to adult education programs and non-regular curriculums.

Exemption from the Rule

If a student meets the criteria for an exemption from the student eligibility rule, they may be eligible for CalFresh. The county must evaluate the circumstances of any household member who is identified as a student to determine if they are subject to the student eligibility rule and whether they meet the criteria for any of the exemptions.

Exemptions

There are no exemptions from the student eligibility rule specifically for foster youth. However, there are many reasons a student might be exempt from the Student Eligibility Rule.



Exemptions:

- **Does Not Expect to Be Enrolled Next Term** - A student who does not expect to be enrolled in the next school term, is not subject to the student eligibility rule.
- **Age** – Students who are age 17 or younger, or age 50 or older.
- **Disabled** – Students who receive disability-based income meet the definition of being disabled. The disability must be expected to last more than 30 days.

Exemptions:

- **Physically or Mentally Unfit to Work** – a student who does not receive disability-based income but is unfit to work an average of 20 hours per week on an ongoing basis due to illness, disability, condition, or life circumstance.
- **Receipt of a TANF Funded Benefit** - A student receiving a TANF-funded benefit such as CalWORKs, Tribal TANF, TANF-funded Cal Grant A or B, and any other program funded with the TANF block grant.

Exemptions:

- **Paid Work** - A student who is paid for working an average of 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month.
- **Work Study** – Student has been approved, awarded, or accepted for state or federally financed work study and anticipate working during the term.
- **Parental Control for a Child Under Age Six** - A student who is exerting parental control over a dependent household member under the age of six.

Exemptions:

- **Parental Control for a Child Under Age Twelve Without Adequate Child Care** - A student who is exerting parental control over a child who is age 6 to age 12, and adequate child-care services are not available.
- **Single Parent Responsible for Child Under Twelve** - A student enrolled full-time who is a single parent with responsibility for the care of a dependent child under age 12.

Exemptions:

- **Attending School as Part of an Employment and Training Program** - A student who is attending through one of the following:
 - Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA)
 - CalFresh Employment and Training (CalFresh E&T) Program
 - State or local government E&T programs for individuals with low income.
 - Any program on the [Local Programs that Increase Employability \(LPIE\) list](#).

Verification of Exemptions

- California has elected to not require verification of exemptions from the student eligibility rule unless the information is questionable.
- In most cases, customer statement is sufficient verification of exemption from the student eligibility rule. Documentary evidence is not required.

Treatment of Financial Aid

Most types of financial aid do not count in CalFresh:

- Title IV – Pell grants, Cal grants, Stafford loans, etc.
- Fee waivers – California College Promise
- Bureau of Indian Affairs and Title XIII
- Carl D. Perkins
- Work Study
- Deferred loans
- ...and many more

Treatment of Financial Aid

If financial aid is not exempt, allowable educational expenses may be deducted from the countable income including:

- tuition and mandatory fees,
- books,
- materials and supplies,
- transportation,
- dependent care

Thank you for your questions!

Submit questions to:
CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov

Resources

- CDSS CalFresh Student Eligibility Handbook Version 2.0 - [ACL 24-31](#) – scroll to page 5 to view Handbook
- CDSS CalFresh Policy Guidance - [Policy Guidance](#)
- CWDA Conference Presentation - [CalFresh and Foster Care - Understanding Eligibility and Promoting Cross Coordination](#)
- Alliance for Children's Rights CalFresh Self-Advocacy Guide - [Transition Age Youth Resource: CalFresh Self-Advocacy Guide 2024](#)

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